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Lawrence University Names Jill Beck College's 15th President

Posted on: January 23rd, 2004 by Rick Peterson

Jill Beck, former dean of the Claire Trevor School of the Arts at the University of California, Irvine and current director of the da Vinci Research Center for Learning Through the Arts at UCI, Friday (1/23/04) was named the 15th president of Lawrence University.

Beck will succeed Richard Warch, who is retiring June 30. Warch is completing a 25-year tenure, the second-longest presidency in Lawrence history. He is currently the longest-serving college president in Wisconsin and, according to the Chronicle of Higher Education, one of only 20 sitting presidents in the country who have achieved the 25-year mark or beyond. Beck, 54, will assume office July 1 as the first woman president in Lawrence's 158-year history.

"I am delighted and honored for the opportunity to carry on Lawrence University's well-earned reputation as one of the country's finest liberal arts colleges," said Beck. "Lawrence is unique in having achieved excellence in both the performing arts and the liberal arts and sciences, and in finding a way to properly balance each.

"Former Lawrence president Henry Wriston noted that 'Only when the intellect and the emotions work together can a satisfactory result be achieved.' It will be a privilege to offer leadership to the Lawrence community in working toward that goal, of providing learning experiences that develop all of our human capabilities."

Jeffrey D. Riester, chair of the Lawrence University Board of Trustees, cited Beck's breadth of academic, administrative and fundraising leadership as well as her passionate commitment to the

liberal arts among the attributes that made her a compelling candidate.

“We set out to find the best person in the country to lead Lawrence University into its future and we had the extraordinary good fortune to discover Jill Beck,” said Riester, a 1970 Lawrence graduate.

Robert Buchanan, who served as chair of a 15-person committee consisting of trustees, faculty members, representatives of the student body, alumni and administrative staff, which conducted an extensive national search, said Beck was the unanimous recommendation of the search committee.

“Dr. Beck has compiled an impressive record of academic excellence. She has a demonstrated track record of finding creative management solutions to complex issues and an inclusive style of problem-solving that superbly qualifies her to be an outstanding president of Lawrence University,” said Buchanan, a 1962 Lawrence graduate. “Add to this an articulate, warm, engaging personality and it becomes clear we have found an exceptional leader for Lawrence.”

Classicist Daniel Taylor, who also served on the search committee, said Beck stood out among a strong field of candidates early in the process.

“Jill Beck emerged immediately as a candidate in whom we were obviously going to be seriously interested. The more we learned about her, the more interested we became,” said Taylor, Hiram A. Jones Professor of Classics and a 1963 Lawrence graduate. “She’s a genuine renaissance woman as her lengthy career accomplishments attest.

“Moreover, she’s a born leader,” Taylor added. “She seems to be

surrounded by an aura of creativity and what is most impressive, she inspires creative thinking in those around her. She describes her own undergraduate liberal arts education as life transforming and that's exactly what a Lawrence education is intended to be. What I like best about her vision of the academic world, however, is that she deems what we do in the liberal arts as noble."

An award-winning administrator and a nationally recognized arts innovator, Beck founded the ArtsBridge America program in 1996 and established the da Vinci Research Center for Learning Through the Arts in 2001 during her tenure (1995-2003) as UCI's dean of the Claire Trevor School of the Arts. She currently serves as director of both programs and holds the rank of full professor in UCI's department of dance.

Beck has earned numerous honors for her leadership of ArtsBridge America, a national model for the advancement of educational arts partnerships between universities and K-12 communities. Under her direction, the outreach program has grown from just seven students in 1996 to nearly 1,000 university students at 17 institutions in California and eight other states, providing experientially-based arts instruction to school children in urban and low-income areas.

In 1998 the ArtsBridge America program was recognized with a national dissemination award from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) and has received several other awards for its work with schools and communities.

During her eight years as dean of the School of the Arts, Beck also established four \$1,000,000 endowed professorships, directed a \$22 million capital campaign, increased undergraduate applications to the arts department by 70% over a four-year period and created ArtsWeek, an annual visual and performing arts

festival that showcases the research and creative work of faculty and students.

In 2002, Beck was awarded the UCI Medal, the university's highest honor, in recognition of her "visionary leadership in building community." She received the Disney Corporation's Jack Linquist Award for Innovation in 2000 for her work with ArtsBridge and its creative approach to social problems and the American Red Cross' Clara Barton Award for humanitarian service in the arts that same year. The Orange County Department of Education honored Beck last year with its Outstanding Contributions to Education Award.

A native of Worcester, Mass., Beck earned a Bachelor of Arts degree cum laude in philosophy and art history at Clark University in 1970 and a master of arts degree in history and music from McGill University in 1976. She earned her doctorate in theatre history and criticism in 1984 from City University of New York.

A passionate advocate of interdisciplinary arts education, Beck has written broadly on issues of arts education, as well as directed ballet and modern dance repertory extensively. Fluent in French, Beck has lived in Canada, France and Australia and traveled broadly throughout Europe and Asia.

During her career, Beck has been the assistant director of the dance division at The Julliard School and was the chair of the dance department at City College of New York, Connecticut College and Southern Methodist University before being appointed dean at UCI. Irvine is the fourth-largest campus of the University of California system with 23,000 students and 1,300 faculty members. UCI was ranked among the top 50 best national universities by U.S. News & World Report in its 2004 "America's Best College's" guide.

Beck is married to Robert Beck, a professor of education at UCI.